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ABSTRACT

Even as individual colleges and universities work to make their own general education programs more coherent, fewer and fewer students proceed through those programs according to plan. Students frequently say that their general education programs add up to an assortment of fragments to be assembled and then left behind. How should the educational system close the gap between the purpose of general education programs and the absence of purpose students often experience when they take general education courses? That question is the focus of this collection. The first section contains an opinion piece by Robert Shoenberg: (1) "Why Do I Have To Take This Course?" or Credit Hours, Transfer, and Curricular Coherence. Part 2, Continuing the Discussion, contains: (2) Who Wants Coherence? (Marshall A. Hill); (3) Can We Work with Our Legislatures? (Eduardo Padron); (4) What Do Our Students Value? (Rod A. Risley); (5) Define the Role of State Systems (Martha Romero); (6) Leadership Is Essential (Ron Williams); (7) Don't Sacrifice Local Autonomy (John Nixon); and (8) Will We Reform Ourselves, or Will It Be done to Us? (Deborah L. Floyd). Part 3, More Perspectives on Curricular Coherence and Student Transfer, contains: (9) What Do We Know about Transfer? An Overview (James C. Palmer); (10) Accrediting for Curricular Coherence (Carolyn Prager); and (11) Lessons from Adult Learning (William H. Maehl). Each paper contains references. (SLD)

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the Academy in Transition

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General Education in an Age of Student Mobility

An invitation to discuss systemic curricular planning

Essays by Robert Shoenberg and others

AAC&U Association of American Colleges and Universities

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FIFTH IN A SERIES OF DISCUSSION PAPERS FOR FACULTY MEMBERS AND ACADEMIC LEADERS

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An invitation to discuss systemic curricular planning

Essays by Robert Shoenberg and others

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the Academy in *Transition*

Jerry G. Gaff
Series Editor

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About this series

THIS SERIES OF OCCASIONAL PAPERS REFLECTS THE CONVICTION of AAC&U that, as the name states, we are witnessing The Academy in Transition. Change presents difficulties and opportunities for both individuals and institutions. For some, confusion, frustration, and fear cloud efforts to understand and gain control over events. For others, change is energizing, presenting opportunities and calling forth creative responses. Still others find competing calls for change—conflicting agendas advocated by different individuals and organizations and uncertainty about the results of alternative courses of action—reason for continuing with practices that have worked in the past. The purposes of this series are to analyze changes taking place in key areas of undergraduate education and to provide "road maps" about the directions and destinations of the changing academy. Although we may still be on an uncertain journey, having a map increases the chances that we get to where we want to go, and it reduces the ambiguity.

During transitions, it is important to retain central values, even as forms and structures that have supported those values may have to be adapted to new circumstances. For instance, we are convinced that a contemporary understanding of liberal education is a sound vision for a high quality baccalaureate education, even as some of its meanings and practices may be altered. As the titles in this series suggest, we envision that a high quality education emphasizes connections between academic disciplines, prizes general education as central to an educated person, and includes global and cross-cultural knowledge and perspectives. Collectively, these essays point to a more purposeful, robust, and efficient academy that is now in the process of being created.

AAC&U encourages faculty members, academic leaders, and all those who care about the future of our colleges and universities to use these papers as a point of departure for their own analyses of the directions of educational change. We hope these essays will encourage academics to think broadly and creatively about the educational communities we inherit, and, by our contributions, the educational communities we want to create.

These essays can be useful in a number of ways.

- They can provide the basis for important conversations among campus groups interested in enhancing international education, exploring connections between domestic diversity and intercultural perspectives, and encouraging interdisciplinary studies, for example.
- They can help members of particular committees, such as those reviewing general education, to quickly get an overview of national trends and issues.
- They can help to launch conversations with members of the Board of Trustees or with community leaders about important educational issues and programs.
- They can provide campus leaders with useful language and conceptual schemes, drawn from both theory and practice.

I would be interested in hearing from readers about how these essays have been used, the value they provided, and suggestions for improving future issues. Thoughts about topics and suggestions for possible authors are particularly welcome.

Jerry G. Gaff, Series Editor

Foreword

Foreword

INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY IS ONE OF THE DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS of American higher education. Across the United States, there exists a tremendous variety of colleges and universities: public and private institutions, liberal arts colleges, women's colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges, and community colleges. Among these very different institutions, specialized accrediting agencies, licensing bodies, and professional societies have attempted to bring curricular coherence to the major, while the individual institutions themselves have responded to calls for degree integrity through seemingly endless debates about general education distribution requirements and periodic accreditation self studies.

Intra-institutional attempts to bring coherence to the curriculum do not have much meaning in an environment in which students are increasingly mobile, transferring between institutions, perhaps several times on the way to a degree. For community colleges, this is not a new phenomenon; since their founding one hundred years ago, transfer has been one of their major missions. A great deal of their credibility as institutions depends upon the ability of their students to transfer courses, and advising students is a difficult challenge when receiving institutions have no commonality in graduation requirements. Whenever a receiving institution does not accept transfer credit, students lose precious time and money. For public institutions, these transition problems damage the reputation of the community college and invite legislators to make decisions best left to educators.

Robert Shoenberg makes a case that the credit hour is no longer adequate to serve as academic currency as students transport evidence of learning between institutions. He calls for system-wide agreements about the intended outcomes of the general education program. Although the credit hour has at least served the purpose of permitting students to transfer, it has never been an assurance that students have received the same level of course instruction even within one institution. And, of course, academic discussions and transfer agreements have been based upon coverage of material rather than evidence of learning.

Pioneering work is being done in a few consortia of institutions to identify what a college education should mean, and what knowledge and skills that graduates should have. Faculty members in these institutions are moving beyond parochial interests in order to improve the

learning experience for students and to assure the quality of the degree. Of course, even in the most progressive institutions, there is resistance and complacency to these changes. However, as Shoenberg points out, academia is being pushed by students, parents, state legislatures, and accrediting associations to develop meaningful assessment of learning.

It is time for the higher education community in the United States to engage seriously in a dialogue focused on curricular coherence and student transfer in this environment of increasing student mobility and continued attention to institutional accountability. That dialogue should reach across the traditional boundaries to include higher education practitioners and scholars and those in community colleges as well as their four-year colleagues. I commend the work of the Association of American Colleges and Universities in calling for a focus on these significant issues through this publication, and I hope for a response from a united higher education community.

George R. Boggs

President, American Association of Community Colleges

January 2001

Foreword

Foreword

WHAT IS AN EDUCATED PERSON? WHAT SHOULD EDUCATED PEOPLE KNOW and be able to do when they graduate from college? Over the last twenty years, these distinctively American questions have been addressed in the context of "general education reviews" by virtually every college and university faculty in the United States. And while every campus has its own unique history and mission, there has begun to emerge a discernible national consensus about what really matters in college learning. There is growing agreement that educated people, whatever their choice of major, need grounding in the broad domains of knowledge—sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities—and should also possess:

- a number of core proficiencies, in areas such as writing, quantitative reasoning, logical analysis, and the use of computers;
- the ability to search out, evaluate, and integrate knowledge from many sources and contexts;
- historical and contemporary knowledge of their own and other cultures, the nature of global interdependence, and the societal influences of technological change;
- ethical judgment, grounded values, and a well-developed sense of responsibility;
- and a demonstrated capacity to turn knowledge into good practice (in the work place, the civic arena, and private life).*

Ironically, however, even as individual campuses have clarified the purposes of their general education programs, higher education has seen a tremendous rise in student mobility. Today, the typical American student is one who attends two, three, or even more campuses, pursuing a degree over an extended and interrupted period of time.

Thus, even as individual colleges and universities work to make their own general education programs more coherent, fewer and fewer students proceed through those programs according to plan. Rather, they take courses here and there, cobbling together bits and pieces of more than one curriculum. As students frequently tell us, their general education programs add up not to an intellectual framework but, rather, to an assortment of fragments, to be assembled up and then left behind as quickly as possible.

How do we close the gap between the purpose of general education programs and the *absence* of purpose that students often experience when they take general education courses? That ques-

tion is the focus of this publication.

AAC&U is currently engaged in a major initiative to articulate and promote "Greater Expectations" for student learning. Drawing from the educational goals and innovative curricular models developed at twenty-two "leadership institutions" (including both two-year and four-year schools, selected through a competitive national search), this project will identify and publicize practices that effectively lead to the sorts of high school and college outcomes that the 21st century demands.

One part of this initiative, *Building Greater Expectations for General Education and Student Transfer*, addresses precisely the challenges described in these pages. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, this project follows up on pioneering efforts in several states to clarify and coordinate inter-institutional general education goals and practices. The next step will be to assist many more states in creating general education programs that ensure both ease of transfer and intellectual coherence.

This project, I should add, will *not* attempt to develop common course content in general education—our goals can and should be achieved through many different kinds of content. But AAC&U does believe that we need new efforts—connecting both two- and four-year campuses—to focus on what students are actually expected to do in courses meant to achieve general education outcomes. We'd like to ask, for example, what levels of accomplishment should be attempted and achieved by our students? What kinds of assessments reinforce rather than trivialize students' achievements? How might we help our highly mobile student populations to experience a coherent and purposeful course of study?

We hope you will use *General Education in an Age of Student Mobility* to stimulate discussion of these and other important questions about systemic change in general education. As a society, we have long debated our aspirations for student learning. It's time now to focus on creating shared practices, across different kinds of campuses, in order to meet our students' needs and to honor our own educational principles.

Carol Geary Schneider

President, Association of American Colleges and Universities

January 2001

**To explore the details of this emerging consensus, to read campus documents that reflect it, and to see many more resources on general and liberal education, please visit AAC&U's Knowledge Network (www.aacu-edu.org).*

Opinion

"Why do I have to take this course?" *or* Credit Hours, Transfer, and Curricular Coherence

Robert Shoenberg, Senior Fellow, AAC&U

It was the fashion among novelists in the nineteenth century to give their books two titles: one catchy and allusive to pique interest, the other more prosaic and explanatory. I've chosen this style of titling because what I want this article to be about—helping students make sense of their college education—and the place to which my chain of reasoning keeps pulling me—bureaucratic arrangements for determining degree completion—seem miles apart. Thus, I need two titles.

AAC&U has been working for the past two years with state higher education systems in Georgia and Utah, which are struggling to find cogent and persuasive answers to students' perennial question about general education requirements: "Why do I have to take this course?" But they know they cannot answer the question for students until they can answer it for themselves, until they can agree on a cogent definition of their own curricular intentions. And this is no mean feat, given the structural and bureaucratic realities at hand. Not only must the colleges and universities involved answer to the fiscal and political concerns of state legislatures, respect faculty autonomy, cope with limited tools for assessment, and make sense of a crazy-quilt of student attendance patterns, but they must also arrive at inter-institutional agreements about the purposes of their requirements.

For state systems, the phenomenon of student mobility creates a particularly complicated set of problems. All concerned want, insofar as possible, to make movement within these systems easy and to allow it to be accomplished without loss of credit. The formal mechanisms for creating this "seamlessness" are sets of common core courses and agreements about transfer of credit. But in their zeal to effect ease of transfer, the designers of these agreements often fail to take into account either the variety of ends to which core courses might be taught or the coherence of the general education program or major to which those courses apply. Thus, they tacitly encourage students to mix and match unrelated courses, leading them to see these requirements as so many bureaucratic hurdles to be jumped, not as parts of a purposeful and coherent curriculum.

THE CREDIT CHASE

Why is it so difficult to define, with intellectual clarity, the meaning of an undergraduate education and the interconnections of its parts? Why do we have such trouble answering students when they pose the entirely legitimate question, "Why do I have to take this course?"

Our problem can be traced, I believe, to what may seem a rather distant source: the creation of the credit hour as the standard unit of academic currency. Created early in the twentieth century, the credit hour was designed to bring integrity to a higher education system then rife with diploma mills. The requirement that students complete a specified number of credit hours worth of courses would assure anyone concerned that holders of a degree had done genuine intellectual work to earn it. Over the years, all kinds of voluntary accrediting associations and administrative structures, strengthened by state and federal legislation, have been created to certify that, among other things, colleges and universities meet these basic requirements for the awarding of a bachelor's, associate's, or other degree.

The convenience of the credit hour as common currency has driven out the better but far less fungible currency of intellectual purpose and curricular coherence.

As long as only a small percentage of an age cohort went on to college and stayed at the same institution for four years, the credit hour continued to serve only its original purpose. However, following World War II, as the number and variety of institutions increased and students became more mobile, we discovered a new use for credits. They now began to serve as a highly effective medium of exchange among institutions. Students could accumulate them like so many dollars in their bank accounts, and they could transfer them from one institution to another. To be sure, this currency came in many different types and denominations: semester, quarter, and course credits; upper division and lower division; general education and the major.... But we have been clever and increasingly well-organized in managing the rates of exchange, so that by now we can pretty well exchange credits at College A for those at College B as effectively as we exchange pounds for dollars.

However, the convenience of the credit hour as common currency has driven out the better but far less fungible currency of intellectual purpose and curricular coherence. How easy it is to define a baccalaureate degree as 120 credit hours (the modal requirement) divided in specified ways, also stated in terms of credit hours; and how easy to plug each course into a formula linking class hours (or laboratory hours, or hours in an internship or practicum) to units of credit.

But what do those hours mean in terms of the educational intentions of the courses and the connections among them? Do they cohere in the minds of individual professors and students? When added together, do they comprise a meaningful whole?

The Demand for Efficiency

As student transfer among colleges and universities has increased to the point where the majority of students receive bachelor's degrees from an institution other than the one at which they began study, demands have grown ever more vocal for efficiency in the transfer of credits. Neither students nor state legislatures want to pay twice for the same course. And many schools, anxious to increase their enrollments, also seek to oblige students as fully as possible.

The result has been transfer agreements between institutions and across state systems that spell out in some detail what kinds of courses will transfer in satisfaction of which requirements. Sometimes a general education transfer package is specified by legislation, as in Florida and Ohio, or by direction of the state higher education coordinating system, as in Texas and New York. In many other states, including the two in our project, the higher education authority has brokered transfer agreements by assembling groups of faculty to reach, under some pressure, a system-wide articulation agreement.

However, none of these transfer agreements addresses in any meaningful way the purposes of the general education curriculum, much less the purposes of a baccalaureate degree. Uniformly they assume a general education program consisting of a loose distribution requirement plus competence in writing, mathematics, and, increasingly, computer use. They give some definition of the content of courses that meet the requirements, but they offer few details as to the goals to be reached through study of that content. As far as these transfer agreements are concerned, all social science or science or humanities courses are created equal. Never mind that the introductory Political Science course at one institution addresses a different set of purposes than the introductory course at another—they are identical in the eyes of the transfer agreement. Never mind that some schools offer a rigorous and integrated general education program while others do not. Any collection of courses from whatever source, no matter how lacking in coherence, must be accepted for transfer if they are in the same subject matter domains.

Florida, for example, has by legislative requirement developed a common course numbering system across its public institutions, specifying that all courses with the same number are entirely interchangeable. A statewide committee determines the credit hour equivalencies, but their

oversight does not extend to the purposes of each course, nor to measuring student achievement. Any survey of, say, American History to 1865 is equivalent to any other, no matter that one course drills students on names and dates, while another raises complex questions about the nature of historical inquiry.

The result of these kinds of credit-driven transfer regulations is a lowest-common-denominator general education program, based invariably on loose distribution requirements. And since unique courses of study only serve to make transfer difficult for students, schools have an incentive not to make their own general education offerings too adventurous or challenging.

These practical restrictions are equally frustrating to two- and four-year institutions. The community colleges, which must prepare students planning to transfer to any of several baccalaureate institutions, can ill afford to create general education programs with distinct character. The four-year colleges have somewhat more leeway in designing programs for their native students, but they cannot hold transfer students to those requirements. And when a majority of their graduates turn out to have transferred their general education credits from institutions with quite different goals, what can the four-year institutions (even those with carefully structured general education programs) say about the integrity of their degrees?

A NEED FOR SYSTEMIC REFORM

The demands for transfer efficiency not only push general education programs to the lowest common denominator but they also tend to conflict with demands for educational accountability. Since colleges and universities require a heavy investment by students and taxpayers, they are expected to demonstrate effectiveness in achieving the outcomes they promise. In other words, each school must show that its students are meeting its educational goals. But how does an institution measure results against goals if it has no clear educational goals and, indeed, is de facto discouraged from defining them (at least for general education) too precisely, lest they get in the way of efficient transfer?

The solution is to stop treating this as a problem for the *individual* institution. The only way to reconcile the demands for efficiency and accountability is to come to inter-institutional or, better yet, system-wide agreement about the intended outcomes of the general education program, and then to link those outcomes closely to the transfer agreement. Accountable to a clear, coherent, and common set of purposes, individual schools might then invest in local curricular reforms without having to worry about ease of transfer.

However, no states have as yet built these sorts of curricular outcomes into their transfer guidelines, even where agreements have been negotiated among academics rather than imposed by legislators. Thus, the recent and ongoing work of the state systems in Georgia and Utah promises to set an important precedent and serves to illustrate the challenges at hand.

Linking Assessments to Shared Goals

During the 1998-99 academic year, faculty from these states' public two- and four-year institutions began working with AAC&U (supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education) to develop new system-wide goals for general education, to gain broad faculty and student understanding of them, and to come up with ways to assess them.

Each state already had an existing set of general education requirements, based on the standard English/Math/Distribution model (though Georgia's newly-minted plan is rather more detailed and includes a strong, statewide, faculty-dominated administrative and policy structure). Neither set of requirements, however, included a clear statement of goals for the program. They simply set forth the subject matter areas to be covered and the number of credit hours to be completed in each area, giving no rationale for those requirements. Thus, a student might ask, "Why do I have to take this course?" and a faculty member would be at a loss to give an answer other than, "Because it's required."

The work going on in Georgia and Utah has to be characterized as rationalization after the fact. The requirements already having been established, faculty in these states have to decide what they meant—or more properly want to mean—by them in terms of students' ability to know, do, and understand. Both state systems are driven to this task by firm mandates to assess outcomes, and by the awareness that they cannot do this without knowing what outcomes they want to achieve.

With such an arrangement in place, the faculties in Georgia and Utah certainly have their work cut out for them. Consider, for example, the ubiquitous requirement that students complete a college-level mathematics course. Students whose major fields of study require regular use of mathematical skills will seldom question this requirement, but the many who expect never to use anything more than simple arithmetic and geometry frequently wonder why they must take such a course. Leaving aside the vexed question of what constitutes "college-level math," one might argue that "Educated people should be numerate as well as literate." Well, why? And, more

trenchantly, what mathematical knowledge makes a person "numerate?" Is it a higher level of mathematical skill than might normally be expected of high school graduates? Is it a greater or different kind of facility with arithmetic and basic algebra? Is it probability and statistics? Mathematical modeling? And how do we increase the likelihood that students will continue to use their new skills, so that they don't forget what they learned as soon as the course is over?

Adapting recommendations from the Quantitative Literacy Subcommittee of the Mathematical Association of America, Utah faculty agreed on a short list of skills that define a "quantitatively literate college graduate." Rather than focusing on the prerequisites for advanced math classes, they reasoned that all educated people, math majors included, ought to be able to interpret and manipulate the sorts of mathematical information that support arguments in a range of fields. For example, graduates should be able to:

1. Interpret mathematical models such as formulas, graphs, tables, and schematics, and draw inferences from them.
2. Represent mathematical information symbolically, visually, numerically, and verbally.
3. Use arithmetic, algebraic, geometric, and statistical methods to solve problems.
4. Estimate and check answers to mathematical problems in order to determine reasonableness, identify alternatives, and select optimal results.
5. And recognize that all mathematical and statistical methods have limitations.

Such a list offers guidance in deciding which approach to course content is best suited to a general education course, as well as providing a strong connection between the outcomes of the particular course and the larger purposes of the curriculum. Further, it gives faculty members some basis upon which to answer the question, "Why do I have to take this course?"

Building faculty support

Of course, the difficulty lies in encouraging all of the system's faculty members, at all different kinds of institutions, to teach to the purposes of the requirement. The lever most likely to shift this heavy weight is assessment, which asks students to demonstrate the requisite competence, and which promises institutional embarrassment if faculty do not teach to the agreed-upon goals. But the fulcrum on which the lever is to be mounted is not yet in place; institutional commitments to assessments of student competency are not yet firm. Nor, for that mat-

ter, is the lever itself—the existing collection of assessment strategies—strong enough to lift the weight of custom.

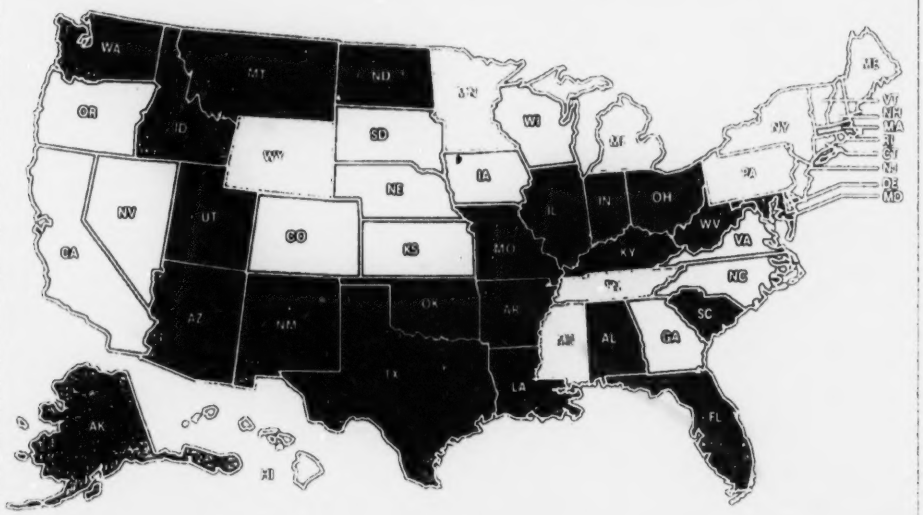
Certainly, some institutions and a few states require students at the mid-point of their baccalaureate programs to pass tests demonstrating general skills and knowledge. Both the ETS and ACT have developed such examinations, and they are used with some frequency either to test individual students or to assess the institution's effectiveness in general education. These tests are responsibly developed, but they are, of necessity, geared to the lowest common denominator in order to maximize the number of institutions that can use them. In many situations in which they are used, the examinations do not follow closely what is actually taught, how it is taught, and the testing methods with which students are familiar. Thus, the value of test results as an indicator of the institution's success in helping students meet the institutional goals—assuming that it has clear goals aligned to the standardized examination—is highly questionable.

Until outcomes assessment is developed to the point where it seems credible to the majority of faculty, we appear to be stuck with our credit hour addiction. Academia is, however, being pushed to break the habit from a variety of quarters: state legislatures and student and parent constituencies that want to see concrete improvements; re-entry students who come back to school to be certified for specific competencies; professional accrediting associations that are beginning to lean toward outcomes-based accreditation (a notable example is the set of "ABET 2000" standards of the Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology.); and regional accreditors who are slowly but surely pushing their members in the same direction.

All these forces are at work in Georgia and Utah, leading state systems there to clarify their goals in the manner of the mathematics objectives cited above. As the experience in those states has suggested, reaching this kind of clarity is not as impossible as it looks. Cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary groups of faculty, assembled at the state level, can fairly readily arrive at a mutually agreeable statement of the general intentions that implicitly underlie basic skills and distribution requirements. But these groups are generally made up of faculty members who accept the importance of such understandings. Gaining their acceptance by the faculty back home is another matter. A comparative handful of willing faculty can accomplish the task in the abstract; turning those abstract understandings into concrete actions with real consequences for faculty and students is another matter.

Neither state group has yet gone through this process, and it will require a massive effort both logistically and politically, even in a state with as few higher education institutions as

Transfer and Articulation: State Policies as of January 2000



Twenty-two states have implemented statewide core curricula, in order to facilitate transfer of credits among public 2- and 4-year colleges. Most of these states specify the number of credit hours required per subject area, and many specify the particular courses that comprise the general education program.

Thirteen states have crafted articulation agreements that apply within a particular segment of the higher education system but not across the entire state. For example, general education courses automatically transfer between California's community colleges and the University of California system, but there is no such agreement between the University of California system and the California State University system.

Fifteen states have no segmental or statewide articulation agreements in place. However, there often exist local articulation agreements between these states' two- and four- year colleges.

From a survey commissioned by AAC&U and conducted by associate professor Daryl Smith and doctoral student Mandana Hashemzadeh at the Claremont Graduate School of Education.

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Utah—nine public two- and four-year schools, plus one major private university. For example, the process will have to involve discipline-by-discipline discussions, acceptance of the outcomes of those discussions by large numbers of faculty, the certification of individual courses as meeting the guidelines, and the effort to deal with the fallout when courses are not certified.

Yet, to engage in this work is the only way we can hope to move away from our present habit of simply counting credit hours, with only the most superficial look at what lies behind them. Though the majority of college graduates no longer earn their degrees at a single institution, they generally do complete them within a single higher education system. If the integrity of a single college's or university's program once guaranteed that an individual student would have a coherent educational experience, it now must be the entire system that provides this curricular integrity.

State systems, and other groupings of related institutions among which students move, need to emulate the long and difficult process of agreeing about intentions that has begun in Georgia and Utah. Only then can we provide a useful answer to the student who asks, "Why do I have to take this course?"

Continuing the discussion

Continuing the discussion

Who wants coherence?

Marshall A. Hill, Assistant Commissioner, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Bob Shoenberg assumes that most people value curricular coherence—but I'm not sure that's the case. For many years, higher education has promoted itself first and foremost as a vehicle for economic development, both personal and societal. When appropriations are on the line, it's certainly easier to rally support around economic needs than to rally people around the task of educating a responsible, well-rounded citizenry. And as long as some in society (and some of our students) seem to believe that economic development is the only desirable outcome of higher education, then students (perhaps supported by parents and legislators) will continue to look at the general education curriculum and ask, "Why do I have to take this course?"

Shoenberg's effort to link the problem of coherence to the evolution of the credit hour is intriguing. However, I suspect that the more powerful forces have to do with the changing nature of higher education itself, particularly two factors: the laudable expansion of academic opportunity beyond the privileged classes (and the consequent imperative to teach toward "real-world" benefits), and, relatedly, the ever-changing mixture of "education" and "training" expected of our institutions. Personally, I'm not optimistic that state-level solutions will be effective at responding to such forces—especially in large states with complex governance structures. (And, of course, those states are the ones in which problems of transfer and curricular coherence are most pressing.)

So where does that leave us? It may be that students will have to assume greater personal responsibility for getting a "coherent" education, and that we'll have to do a better job of advising them, helping them to navigate the distribution requirements and state-level expectations already in place. Perhaps coherence will come after they leave us and embark upon the "lifelong learning" for which we seek to equip them. And perhaps we'll have to accept that when we

increase the range and scope of higher education, and when we expand its availability to people of all ages and backgrounds, we must accept less coherence than we would prefer, and we must regard that as a reasonable and socially responsible trade-off.

Can we work with our legislatures?

Eduardo Padrón, District President, Miami-Dade Community College

Unfortunately, the system-wide coherence that Bob Shoenberg seeks is easier said than done. In fact, there exists a pervasive mindset that works against achieving it, important as the goal may be. Institutional missions differ; viewpoints within each institution vie to be heard; and legislatures impose resource and time restrictions that differ radically from institutions' perceived needs.

We may strive to create "smooth" and "seamless" roads for our students, taking the bumps—the credits that don't transfer or meet university departmental requirements—out of their ride through higher education. However, as Shoenberg argues, the currency of the credit hour has taken precedence over intellectual purpose and curricular coherence. Thus, our students make choices based on ease of transfer, often foregoing the more challenging or intellectually satisfying courses of study.

For the most part I agree with Shoenberg's reform agenda. But I would also suggest that we devote special attention to the state mandates imposed on many of our systems. Specifically, we must do more to educate our legislatures—the mission of the community college often remains under-appreciated, and the resource requirements remain unmet.

At the same time, though, we must also satisfy those legislatures. Despite their lack of appreciation, they remain our primary support; we cannot view them as adversaries. If we want to advise them regarding the most productive ways to proceed, we need to develop dependable relationships and assume a very proactive posture. That takes time, energy, and an effort to develop contacts.

Here in Florida, for instance, the legislature decided that 15% of funding for A.S. programs must be "earned back" through performance-based funding. We have no argument with the concept itself, but we do see a need to lobby for performance milestones that are relevant and fair for our students. For example, we believe that accomplishments in developmental English,

basic skills, and short-term training ought to be given greater priority. Overall funding should also take into account the specifics of our student population—economically disadvantaged, disabled, limited English proficiency, and welfare-to-work students require special attention and added resources. In the same vein, operating in an urban locale requires a cost differential that compensates the institution for the higher cost of operations.

These sorts of nuts and bolts decisions can add up to significant gains for community colleges, and it's important to weigh in on them. But the bigger issue has to do with establishing respect for the institution's mission and goals. In the long run, that must be the principle that guides our relationship with the legislature.

WHAT DO OUR STUDENTS VALUE?

Rod A. Risley, Executive Director, Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society

ROBERT SHOENBERG IS ABSOLUTELY RIGHT IN CALLING FOR SYSTEMIC APPROACHES to defining the purpose and objectives of a general education curriculum. Indeed, such initiatives are decades late in coming. However, if we consider these issues from a student's perspective, we can't help but realize that a major piece of this puzzle is missing, and without it Shoenberg's point is moot.

Educators must understand that students today see themselves as consumers, and they view education as a product. To many, this notion is distasteful. But it is reality. The challenge before us is to not only define objectives and minimum standards for general education but also to offer these consumers a solid rationale as to why a general education has relevance. It is not enough to provide for seamless transfer and a coherent curriculum when the students themselves fail to see the value in general study.

Many students enroll in community colleges not with the thought of purchasing a broadly based education, but rather to register for the minimum number of courses needed to get a better job. They are mesmerized by the salaries commanded in the high-technology arena. Forget general education—they want the bare-bones number of courses that will get them out of college and into the job market as quickly as possible. They are savvy consumers of training and credit, but they are not necessarily well-informed consumers of education.

But who is responsible for making the case as to the purpose, objectives, and value of a general education? Can two-year college administrators take on this role? Not likely—as they come under increasing pressure to provide contract training for local businesses, they've been forced to give higher and higher priority to work-force development.

Our problem demands, I think, the unlikely partnership of faculty members and corporate and public leaders. Given the present dynamics, they are the ones most likely to take an introspective look at the general education curriculum, and they have the most freedom to communicate its value.

Define the Role of State Systems

Martha Romero, President, College of the Siskiyous

At first glance, Bob Shoenberg's proposal appears straightforward and simple: he would assign state systems of higher education the task of creating educational standards in general education that are common and consistent across institutions. However, the problem is that elected officials are prone to making broad policy decisions based on whatever unique cases attract their attention. For example, a constituent might complain that a particular university refuses to transfer credit for a specific English class... Single incidents like this one have been known to provoke legislation that addresses the transfer of credit for all English classes. And this violates that which we consider fundamental in our business, the notion that curricular coherence must come from the faculty (the experts), not from the sort of political process that favors one interest group today and another tomorrow.

Yet, many of us (faculty and administrators) resist engaging in discussions of the common goals of general education—in striving to define our own institutions as both unique and superior to the competition, we have forgotten that the standards of our collective enterprise are at stake. If we are to redeem ourselves, we must give up our provincialism and territorialism and articulate the common, desired outcomes of our general education programs.

If faculty cannot embrace this role, they may lose the opportunity to influence the results. Several years ago I got a glimpse of this outcome when I toured a number of British technical institutions. The primary complaint of faculty was that they had lost the power to teach; they had become state verification technicians for a common set of testing procedures.

State higher education systems can play an important role if they limit their involvement to

their appropriate policy functions, such as building local capacity to solve problems; or convening faculty committees and charging them with the task of defining desired outcomes; or creating incentives for faculty across institutions to define and measure student achievement in congruent and coherent ways.

If led by competent and enlightened professionals who believe in the power of good education, state systems can also serve as buffers between the academy and the legislature. After all, they have the political access and credibility to interpret institutional roles and functions to other elected officials. They often also have credibility within the educational system to interpret legislative priorities. In short, they can be effective translators of the ethos and culture of each enterprise. But in order to do so, state systems of higher education must understand and uphold the roles of all stakeholders. Only then will good policy evolve.

Leadership is essential

Ron Williams, President, Prince George's Community College

Our institution is in the process of doing what Robert Shoenberg says needs to be done. Starting with general education and expanding to all courses, we are determining what the core content should be and how we should assess student learning of that content. In short, we are engaged in articulation. Because of our assessment program, we can, with assurance, tell receiving institutions what outcomes are expected from our courses.

At the state level, Maryland's two- and four-year college and university faculty have jointly developed a scoring system for determining what constitutes a "C" paper in English, and similar work is going on in other disciplines. The purpose is to standardize the course content and assessment of student performance so that they are comparable from institution to institution within the state. These statewide efforts do not rely on credit hours; they rely on outcomes. The voluntary standardization of these general education courses gives meaning to credit hours.

Yet another cross-institutional, cross-disciplinary faculty group was charged by the statewide council of two- and four-year Chief Academic Officers to develop an articulated undergraduate teacher preparation program. As a result, an outcome-based model for the first two years has been developed. At the end of this process, the colleges in the state of Maryland will arrive at a system-wide agreement about intended outcomes.

Essential in this process of building outcomes-based articulation has been the state and insti-

tutional leadership. Faculty are ready to engage in intellectual discourse focused on outcomes, we've learned, but only when provided administrative support and leadership. The challenge lies in assembling cross-institutional disciplinary faculty groups and providing a clearly defined charge. Institutions have to empower these faculty to become effective advocates for change in their departments.

Contrary to Shoenberg's statement, general education programs with distinct character are not necessarily deterrents to effective articulation and transfer. At our institution we are developing interconnections among the general education courses and creating a program with a unique character, but this will in no way diminish the transferability of the program to senior institutions. It will, however, give a meaningful answer to the question, "Why do I have to take this course?"

Don't sacrifice local autonomy

John Nixon, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Santa Ana College

Robert Shoenberg paints a very interesting, if bleak, picture of articulation and transfer among colleges and universities across the nation. However, I believe he misses the mark, both in his indictment of the credit hour and in his proposed remedy, system- or statewide competency based curriculum and outcomes assessment. While demonizing the credit hour may have a legitimate place in discussions of teaching and learning, such an indictment is unjustified in a critique of articulation and transfer. In fact, I would assert that the inefficiencies associated with articulation and transfer are not problems at all. Rather, they are, in large measure, positive evidence of the health or our democratic, pluralistic system of higher education.

Contrary to Shoenberg's assertion that faculty do not consider learning outcomes when designing courses and programs, I believe faculty do think in terms of educational purposes, as filtered through their particular local, system, and state mission statements. The resulting courses and programs may, indeed, reflect competency-based approaches to teaching and learning, and they may include broad statements of learning outcomes. However, the specific learning outcomes are defined at the college or university, representing the values, cultures and interests of the local institution and its constituencies.

Shoenberg cites work underway in Utah, where faculty have developed broadly defined statements of competency in math, as a first step toward successful reform. He goes on to assert that

outcomes assessment, driven by statements of competency, must become part of any successful system-wide reform effort. But when such competency statements are translated into test items for outcomes assessment, the result can easily be a homogenous curriculum, one that excludes local interests and needs. (Recall, for example, the furor over cultural literacy.)

Articulation and transfer among colleges and universities is messy and often inefficient, just as life in a pluralistic democracy is often messy and inefficient. Yet the good derived from democratic systems far outweighs the inconveniences and hard work involved. Shoenberg's approach represents far too great of a sacrifice, I believe. It would trade an ill-defined hegemony of the credit hour for the hegemony of a homogenous curriculum. While the efficacy of competency based approaches to teaching and learning is widely accepted, its application beyond the level of the individual course, program or institution is problematic, putting at risk the values and practices of democracy, diversity, and difference.

Will We Reform Ourselves, Or Will It Be Done *To* Us?

Deborah L. Floyd, Senior Fellow, AAC&U

Why are governors, legislators, and other elected officials becoming increasingly interested in higher education? Are they responding to pressure from constituents, who are concerned about the real world value of college and university programs? Are they angry with those of us who manage the curriculum, since we seem to live in ivory towers, aloof and protected by academic freedom and tenure? Are they simply frustrated by the slow pace of change on campus?

And if not the politicians, who or what else will trigger real change in higher education? Could it be the recent national report card comparing state higher education systems issued by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education? Or, could it be the enhanced activity of the Education Commission of the States in areas of reform and higher education policy? Maybe the Council for Higher Education Accreditation will nudge the system toward reform by helping colleges to do a better job of measuring what students learn. Perhaps President Bush's education reform plan will spill over to higher education, with constituents demanding greater accountability from colleges and universities. Or will market competition

from for-profit institutions and corporate universities nudge us toward change?

In my opinion, Robert Shoenberg is absolutely correct that the college credit system has become an empty currency rather than a true measure of student learning. As an administrator and a faculty member, I agree that we can and should concentrate our efforts on creating a system that encourages both ease of transfer and curricular coherence. But we have to ask ourselves where the leadership will come from, and what forms will it take?

We can offer countless excuses as to *why* outcomes and learning assessments will not work in higher education, but the reality is that we *must* reform from within. Otherwise, we will be reformed from without, by way of political force. The question isn't whether the transfer and general education system will change—the question is whether we prefer to reform this system ourselves or to wait to have it done to us.

Along with numerous partners, AAC&U has served a role as pathfinder, helping academic leaders in several states to begin finding their ways toward systemic curricular reform. I am optimistic also about AAC&U's *Greater Expectations* project, which is creating a network of institutions that have already designed innovative and coherent undergraduate programs. The challenge, though, will be to build on this momentum and to show that we in higher education can get our own house in order.

More perspectives on curricular coherence and student transfer •

More perspectives

What Do We Know About Transfer? An Overview

James C. Palmer, Associate Professor of Higher Education, Illinois State University

COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS SEEKING THE BACCALAUREATE MUST TRANSFER. For them, transfer is neither an option nor a convenience. It is a requirement built into the structure of the higher education system. And because many minority, low-income, and older students begin their postsecondary studies at community colleges, their access to the baccalaureate depends (to a large degree) on a successful transfer experience.

Despite the importance attached to transfer from community colleges, however, longitudinal data on student movement between two-year and four-year colleges are collected less routinely and consistently than data on enrollments and other cross-sectional measures. Tracking students over time is more complicated and costly than counting students at individual institutions. But occasional longitudinal studies at the national and state levels offer at least some insights into the proportion of total postsecondary transfer activity that is accounted for by student movement from two-year to four-year colleges. The studies also reveal considerable variations between individual community colleges in the rate of student transfer, variations that can be attributed at least partially to the student educational intentions.

The overall transfer picture

Students transfer in all directions. The most recent nationwide picture stems from the U.S. Department of Education's longitudinal study of individuals who entered college for the first time during the 1989-90 academic year (Table 1). By the spring of 1994, 35% had moved on to at least one other institution. The study data showed student movement in all directions: traditional transfer (two-year college to four-year college), reverse transfer (four-year college to two-year college), and lateral transfer (two-year to two-year, four-year to four-year, etc.).

But of all the transfer routes, movement from community colleges to baccalaureate-granting institutions remains the modal pattern. Data on the "first transfer" of students in the

Department of Education's longitudinal study bear this out (Table 2). Thirty percent of that first transfer activity was accounted for by students moving from two- and three-year colleges to four-year colleges; the next largest categories related to lateral transfer (that is, students moving between four-year colleges or between two/three-year colleges).

Occasional state studies yield similar results. For example, Oklahoma reports that of the students transferring from one Oklahoma institution to another in the fall of 1996, 38% were students moving from two-year to four-year institutions, 20% were moving between four-year institutions, 26% were four-year college students who moved to a two-year college, and 13% were students moving from one two-year college to another (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 1997). Data from Illinois show that of the students transferring into public institutions from other in-state institutions in the fall of 1998, 49% were moving from community colleges to public universities; 16% were students transferring between community colleges; 15% were students moving from public universities to community colleges; 9% were students moving from independent, nonprofit colleges to community colleges; 6% were students moving between public universities; 5% were students moving from independent, nonprofit institutions to public universities; and 1% were students moving from independent, for-profit institutions

TABLE 1

Percentage Distribution of 1989–90 First-Time Students According to Transfer Status and Level of Transfer Destination, by Level of First Institution: 1989–1994

		Transferred, by level of destination				
	Did not transfer	Total	Transferred to 4-year	Transferred to 2-year	Transferred to less-than-2-year	Transfer destination unknown
Total	65%	35%	17.8%	13.1%	3.6%	0.5%
Level of 1st institution						
4-year	71.7%	28.3%	15.6%	11.6%	1.0%	0.1%
2-year	57.5%	42.6%	21.8%	14.6%	5.4%	0.8%
Less-than-2-year	75.5%	24.5%	5.8%	11.8%	6.3%	0.6%

Source: McCormick, 1997, p. 7.

to either a community college or a public university (Illinois Board of Higher Education, 1999).

The predominance of two-year-to-four-year transfer is more starkly evident from the university perspective, especially in states with large community college systems. For example, community college students accounted for the vast majority of new transfer students who entered the California State University and the University of California in academic year 1997-98: 81% and 74% respectively (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1999). In Illinois, 82% of the students transferring to public universities from other in-state colleges during the fall of 1998 were former community college students (Illinois State Board of Education, 1999).

All of these figures point to the sizeable contribution of community colleges to baccalaureate education. Additional national data from the U.S. Department of Education reveal that of the students receiving bachelor's degrees from public universities during 1992–93, 18% had started their postsecondary careers at public-two year colleges, as did 11% of the students receiving bachelor's degrees from private, nonprofit colleges (McCormick and Horn, 1996, p. 39). This is just the tip of the iceberg. These figures do not include additional baccalaureate recipients who had started at a four-year college but nonetheless earned credit at a community college, either as a "reverse transfer student" or through concurrent enrollment at a community college.

Community College Transfer Rates

Aggregate data on the magnitude of transfer, however, mask considerable variations in the rate of transfer between states, individual community colleges themselves, and students. Assessing these variations became possible in the 1980s when researchers at the Center for the Study of Community Colleges, based in Los Angeles, applied a consistent definition to calculations of the community college transfer rate. The Center's formula focused on the transfer of first-time students within a four-year time frame. It calculated transfer rates as follows:

> all students entering the community college in a given year who have no prior college experience and who complete at least twelve college units [at the community college] divided into the number of that group who take one or more classes at an in-state, public university within four years (Cohen, 1996, p.28).

This definition necessarily understates the transfer rate, excluding community college students who earned less than twelve credits before transferring, who moved on to out-of-state or who transferred to private institutions. But it at least provides a common framework for com-

TABLE 2

First Transfer of Students Nationwide who Began Postsecondary Studies in 1989 and who had Attended Two or More Institutions by 1994, by Level of Origin and Destination.

Type of Transfer (First Transfer)	% of Students Who Had Attended Two or More Institutions by 1994
From 4-year institution to 4-year institution	19.1%
From 2-3-year institution to 4-year institution	31.0%
From less-than-2-year institution to 3-4-year institution	1.5%
From 4-year institution to 2-3-year institution	14.2%
From 2-3-year institution to 2-3-year institution	20.7%
From less-than-2-year institution to 2-3-year institution	3.0%
From 4-year institution to less-than-2-year institution	1.3%
From 2-3-year institution to less-than-2-year institution	7.7%
From less-than-2-year institution to less-than 2-year-institution	1.6%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1989–90 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:90/94), Data Analysis System. (Available on-line at www.pedar-das.org.)

parison between states and individual community colleges. It also provides a common reference for comparing the transfer rates of different student groups.

Applying this formula to the community colleges of fourteen cooperating states, the Center calculated an average transfer rate of 22% for first-time students entering community colleges in 1990. The average statewide transfer rates ranged from 11% to 40%. Within-state variations between individual community colleges also emerged; in California, for example, transfer rates for individual colleges ranged from 3% to 32% (Cohen, 1996, p. 29).

Center staff also found considerable variation in the average transfer rates of ethnic groups: 24% for Asians, 23% for Caucasians, 13% for African-Americans, and 12% for Hispanics. Yet these rates rose or fell depending on the overall average transfer rate of the institution. In the top institutional quartile (that is, in those community colleges with the highest overall transfer rates), the transfer rates for African-Americans and Hispanics were 20% and 23% respectively, compared to 32% for Caucasians and 27% for Asians. In the bottom quartile, African-

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Americans and Hispanics each had a 6% transfer rate, compared to 10% for Caucasians and 9% for Asians (Cohen, 1996, pp. 29-30). Institutional characteristics fostering transfer clearly affect students across all ethnic categories.

What might these characteristics be? A subsequent Center study comparing community colleges with high and low transfer rates revealed no differences in terms of articulation practices such as common course-numbering systems, faculty exchange with universities, orientation, or visits from university staff. However, colleges with high transfer rates did have "a visible and vigorous transfer center staff, an accessible university with low grade-point averages for transferring students, a staff with expectations regarding transfer, and a history of high transfer even as the population of the district shifted" (Cohen, 1996, p. 31). Transfer plays a more central role in the organizational cultures of some community colleges than others.

These institutional differences notwithstanding, student intentions exert a strong influence on the rate of transfer. For example, the Illinois Community College Board (1998, p. 26) used the Center formula to examine transfer rates for 1990 entering students. Results showed a 22% percent transfer rate for all students, a 29% transfer rate for students enrolled in baccalaureate/transfer programs, and a 34% transfer rate for students who enrolled in baccalaureate/transfer programs and who entered in the community college with the stated intent of transferring. The Illinois data also revealed a 10% transfer rate for all students in occupational programs and a 22% transfer rate for those occupational students who enrolled in the community college with the intent of transferring. Besides reinforcing the important point that students transfer from both occupational and academic programs, these data underscore the fact that transfer is only one component of the community college mission. Many students have no intention of transferring.

From "transfer" to "swirl"

At least two other factors complicate assessments of transfer from two-year to four-year colleges. One is the varying degree to which students stay at the community college before moving on. National data collected by the U.S. Department of Education in the early 1990s show that of the students transferring from two-year to four-year colleges, 9% did so after spending five months or less at the community college, 16% transferred at a point in time between six and ten months after initial enrollment at the two-year college, 33% transferred at some point between eleven and twenty months after initial enrollment, and 42% stayed at the community college for twenty-one months or more before transferring (McCormick, 1997, p. 10). Another

study revealed that of the students transferring from community colleges to a sample of public universities in thirteen states during the fall of 1991, 25% had earned 1-49 semester hours of credit before transferring, 25% had earned 50-63 credits, 25% had earned 63-72 credits, and 25% had earned 72 credits or more; only 37% had earned the associate's degree (Palmer, Ludwig, & Stapleton, 1994, p. 6). While pursuing the baccalaureate, students use the community college in their own ways; many do not follow the traditional "2+2" pattern.

In addition, community colleges cannot be viewed simply as "feeder institutions" to the four-year colleges. Writing in 1990, officials of the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) in Phoenix documented complex patterns of reverse transfer and concurrent enrollment between MCCCD and Arizona State University, arguing that the term "transfer," which implies linear movement between institutions, should be replaced by the notion that students "swirl between and among community colleges and four-year institutions" (de los Santos and Wright, 1990, p. 32). Researchers examining transfer between Portland State University (OR) and three neighboring community colleges documented similarly complex patterns of student movement in the early 1990s. They concluded that, from the student's perspective, institutional boundaries had little meaning: "We found the pattern of student movement between the community colleges and the university to be complex rather than straightforward. Students appear to use the public institutions in the metropolitan area as a system, even though the institutions are entities of four separate governmental agencies" (Kinnick and others, 1998, p. 98).

Our data collection systems, which have only recently offered credible insights into student movement between community colleges and four-year institutions, are just now catching up with this reality. It seems clear that a true understanding of how students experience higher education will depend on further efforts to track the way students themselves use community colleges and universities on the way to the baccalaureate. The key challenge is to augment our knowledge of the magnitude of the educational enterprise (as measured by enrollments) with indicators of student experiences over time.

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Accrediting for Curricular Coherence

Carolyn Prager, Dean of Academic Affairs, Spanish-American Institute (New York City)

If we wish to promote greater curricular coherence in the face of increasing student mobility, then we should seek better forms of cooperation between and among the nation's two- and four-year colleges. Further, we must pay careful attention to the new forces that have come to govern undergraduate transfer, especially shifting labor market trends and state regulations imposed on public colleges and universities. At the same time, though, we should be careful not to overlook the substantial influence wielded by another set of higher education's key players: the regional and professional accrediting agencies. Often the missing link in debates about articulation, these bodies have considerable power either to facilitate or to obstruct holistic approaches to student transfer.

Old habits

Although today's students often migrate from one institution to another, accrediting bodies continue to review programs and schools in isolation, using techniques appropriate to earlier patterns of enrollment and graduation. Both the regional and specialized accreditors tend to focus on how well an individual school or program educates students, with little attention to how well it receives and prepares them for transfer. In short, the accreditors elicit mono-dimensional reviews that do little to support inter-institutional responsibility for the curriculum.

Simply put, the accreditation agencies have not yet recognized the growing importance of transfer from two-year to four-year institutions. In fields as diverse as nursing, court reporting, paralegal studies, and early childhood education, the bachelor's degree has begun to supplant the certificate or associate degree for career entry. Almost all of today's knowledge workers require the baccalaureate for even modest workplace advancement. But many of the accreditors continue to enunciate different academic criteria for the two-year degree and the first two years of the four-year degree, even in identical or related fields, and even within the same region. Thus, they impede equitable transition of career and technical students into baccalaureate programs. Those who complete their applied associate degrees often enter four-year institutions with less than full junior status and with less exposure to the intellectual competencies required for advanced study.

The accreditation community also bears some responsibility for the relative absence of general education reform within the two-year institutions. To begin with, the various specialized accreditors have established very different and often contradictory standards for general education. They require one set of core courses for nursing, another for business, another for engineering, and so on. For the community colleges that sponsor a large number of career and technical programs, this profusion of requirements makes it extremely difficult to define a coherent general education program.

Further, the accrediting community has yet to speak out forcefully against the depressing effects of state transfer compacts on general education reform. On the positive side, such compacts guarantee full junior status to community college graduates who have followed specific course and credit guidelines (usually the traditional arts and science requirements). However, as Robert Shoenberg argues, such compacts not only deter community college faculty from designing an ambitious curriculum but they also exclude their students from those more sophisticated and thoughtful approaches to general education available to many four-year students.

The accrediting community has enormous potential to set an agenda that would hold all institutions more accountable for student progress to the four-year degree.

Accreditation's potential

If they created more demanding expectations of transfer activity, accrediting agencies could reframe the questions we ask (and the answers we receive) about curriculum coherence and student mobility. For example, how might colleges and universities respond if accreditors were to pay more attention to the effects upon students of incongruent curriculum standards in the first two years of applied programs at two- and four-year colleges? Or the effects of transfer compacts that bind two-year colleges, but not four-year schools, to static curriculum models? Or the ways that each institution's programs do or do not mesh with the programs offered at schools from which it receives or to which it sends students?

Indeed, the accrediting community has enormous potential to set an agenda that would hold all institutions more accountable for student progress to the four-year degree. Even within current purviews, accrediting bodies could modify policies and practices to define a more holistic framework for transfer and articulation in some or all of the following ways:

1. **By broadening the definition of "peer" reviewers:** While students may experience a broad universe of teaching institutions and modalities on the way to the baccalaureate, accrediting agencies still tend to restrict the definition of "peer" reviewers to those from like institutions.

Rigid sector-based definitions of peer review undermine basic concepts of academic parity and transfer acceptance within the first two years of undergraduate education. The participation of individuals from other institutional types could enhance reviews by providing perspectives of those with a prior, current, or future vested interest in student preparation. Therefore, regional and programmatic accreditors might consider routine inclusion of faculty and administrators from other sectors on visiting teams, especially on teams visiting schools with large and mobile student populations.

2. **By seeking evidence of strong transfer advocacy:** In addition to looking at how community colleges prepare students for transfer, the review process might consider how two- and four-year schools advocate for the transfer student. As an extension of transfer education, community colleges could take more pre- and post-transfer responsibility for guiding and monitoring students' applications through the transfer maze, intervening for them with the receiving institution, if necessary, to forestall potential arbitrary credit loss. Senior colleges could also provide transfer arbiters to negotiate for the student, in the event of transfer disputes.

3. **By requiring evidence of holistic articulation activity:** Depending on the review agency or team, current accrediting processes may or may not look at some of the factors contributing to better transfer and articulation within a given program or institution. However, in assessing student mobility and curricular coherence, the whole is vastly greater than the sum of its parts. Requiring demonstration of holistic rather than discrete articulation activity could generate review outcomes that cultivate more inter-institutional and inter-sector sharing of responsibility. For example, accreditors might ask: Do institutions assure that transfer students receive the credit status promised by these agreements? Do they negotiate inter-institutional agreements? Do program faculty consider connection and continuity in curriculum development, evaluation, and revision, and do they discuss these matters with faculty from neighboring institutions?

4. **By improving two- to four-year program parity:** Regional accreditors could require two- and four-year colleges to demonstrate that they share responsibility for curricular coherence. And professional accreditors could require the same of career and technical programs, ensuring that the first two years of a degree aim toward similar outcomes at all institutions. Further, they could raise the intellectual standards of those programs by requiring them to integrate the goals of general education into all parts of the curriculum. After all, specialized courses contain ample opportunity for the development of communication, computation, and analytical skills. There is

no reason why students cannot debate ethical dilemmas, learn to write persuasively, or inquire into historical trends, for example, while studying agricultural management, computer science, or any other field. Moreover, there is no reason not to seek a variety of disciplinary perspectives, including those who advocate for general education, when assembling a team to review a professional program. In sum, specialized accreditors could help make learning readiness for baccalaureate study a fundamental rather than an incidental purpose of lower division work.

5. **By increasing bachelor's degree options for applied associate's degree graduates:** Some associate's degree fields lack bachelor's degree counterparts, and some associate's degree graduates require a four-year degree in a different field for career mobility. Accrediting agencies could help these students by encouraging more "downward articulation," whereby four-year schools design ways to build upon an existing two-year program, linking it to a bachelor's degree curriculum. For example, an associate's degree in almost any health science field could fulfill many of the requirements for a bachelor's in health services administration.

Towards curricular congruence

Nearly every state has intervened to protect the public's interest in easing access to the baccalaureate, often by resorting to artificial measures that transfer credit and competencies between and among institutions of higher education. This amounts to an intrusion into curriculum matters previously understood to belong to the academy. For higher education to tolerate curricular intrusion of this sort is strangely at odds with its fundamental principles of voluntary self-regulation and improvement through peer review. Accreditation has enormous potential to restore control over the curriculum to the academic community, but only by redefining responsibility within new and emerging contexts. In an era of student mobility, that will require setting high expectations for inter-institutional collaboration, and it will require that all schools be held responsible for mapping more coherent pathways to the baccalaureate.

Lessons from Adult Learning

William H. Maehl, Professor Emeritus of History, University of Oklahoma, and President Emeritus of The Fielding Institute

The growth over the last generation of the number of adult learners among the total population of higher education enrollments has been well noted. The proportion varies from year to year, but during the 1990s the number of students aged twenty-five and older has risen to between 40% and 45% of all enrollments. Most of these persons are between twenty-five and forty-nine years old, making up 39.4% of the higher education total in 1995. The likelihood is that adult participation will remain at those levels or possibly increase (NCES, 1999).

Given its size, this student population is, of course, quite diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and social background. Further, when compared with traditional-aged students, adults are distinguished by not only their greater mobility but also by their range of personal experiences, their participation in multiple learning activities (both formal and informal), and often by their desire to play a more active role in the design of their own plans of study.

Both the gaps in and the richness of adults' backgrounds present challenges to educators who work with them. Fortunately, though, the field of adult education has compiled a wealth of experience in meeting these challenges, and the long-term success of many adult credit programs provides some important lessons for a higher education community presently coming to grips with new demographic realities and changing patterns of transfer.

The examples I cite here illustrate three basic strategies for achieving the coherence, integration, and critical reflection we desire. First, many adult programs link strong advising or mentoring systems to a high degree of individualization in degree planning. Second, many apply continuing procedures that lead students to make connections among the stages of their study and to reflect on their progress during it. Third, many include a culminating or summative experience that draws together previous learning. Such capstone events may be final requirements or grow out of reflection during the course of the program, but, either way, they involve a closing consideration of the meaning of the program as a whole.

1. Advising and Degree Planning. A long held principle in adult education is to start with the learner. Malcolm Knowles, who deeply influenced many of today's adult educators, extended

this idea to urge that program planning should recognize students' autonomy and involve them in diagnosing their learning needs, designing a plan of learning, and managing and evaluating the learning experience (Knowles, 1980. See also Knowles, 1989; Knowles & Associates, 1985).

Several institutions have followed Knowles' advice and established programs that respond to students' learning styles, apply their previous learning to their new goals, and lay out study plans that accommodate their interests while fulfilling institutional guidelines and standards. A key factor is the continuing relationship between the student and a faculty advisor/mentor, or sometimes an advising committee, who jointly reach agreement on, record, and carry out the program design for the degree.

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SUNY–Empire State College's (ESC) baccalaureate degree is an early example of such a program. Faculty mentors are content specialists in various areas, but they also serve as continuing guides to students as they design and progress in their courses of study. Together, mentors and students establish an initial degree learning plan, selecting from among eleven ESC specializations, and each term they agree upon specific learning activities, while maintaining the overall coherence of the degree.

DePaul University's School for New Learning (SNL) uses a slightly different model, structuring its baccalaureate degree around six areas of competence for adult life, including arts and ideas, the human community, the scientific world, lifelong learning, integrative learning, and a focus area that reflects the student's personal and professional goals. Following a short orientation and an entry seminar, students work with an academic committee that includes a faculty mentor, a professional advisor related to the focus area, and, if desired, a peer advisor. This group develops an initial degree plan of study activities that include course participation, self-study, and field experience. SNL prescribes some of the activities while students define others for themselves. The committee also continues to advise students and eventually assesses their fulfillment of the area competencies.

2. **Connections throughout the Program.** Adult programs adopt various strategies, beyond initial planning, to build connections within the curriculum and to illustrate to students the progress and development they have made. A common approach is to designate a theme, arising from the institution's mission, that extends over one to several courses. For example, Alfred North Whitehead College of the University of Redlands (which has long striven to relate liberal education and professional preparation) includes course requirements in the philosophical foun-

dations and ethics of most of its professional majors. Likewise, the Georgetown University master of arts in liberal studies program includes specially designated human values courses in each degree track. The School for Professional Studies at Regis University in Denver, in addition to stressing values content in its general education requirements, also encourages faculty to consider values issues in their courses across the curriculum.

Several programs have replaced the curriculum of three credit courses with larger blocks of content that are studied as a related whole over semester- or year-long periods. They believe this avoids the fragmentation of a series of discrete courses and enables connections to be made across disciplines and issues. The adult liberal studies programs of the 1960s, such as the University of Oklahoma bachelor of liberal studies degree, defined curriculum in year-long segments of humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences and usually culminated in a fourth interdisciplinary year connecting the preceding three areas. More recently, the McGregor School at Antioch University developed a teacher certification program for bachelor's degree holders that is competency-based, as well as humanistic and developmental in outlook. It is organized in four academic quarter blocks which students address collaboratively in small groups under the guidance of a team of academic and practitioner faculty. These programs sometimes experience difficulty in challenging the hegemony of the traditional three credit course, but they often achieve greater integration of learning.

Still other programs encourage reflection over the course of the degree by asking students periodically to consider their preceding work or to compile portfolio records of their accomplishments. In its early individualized design, the Georgetown University master of arts in liberal studies asked entrants to submit an essay stating their degree goals, followed by essays reflecting on the direction and significance of their study to date, at points one-third and two-thirds through the degree plan. Discussion of the essays with program faculty confirmed the coherence of the study plan or led to revisions.

Portfolio or extended project requirements serve a similar integrating purpose. Columbia Union College's adult evening program requires students to pursue a project leading to a final report or product that integrates course work over the duration of the degree. Students in DePaul University's SNL programs begin a reflective portfolio as part of their initial degree planning. They maintain the portfolio throughout the program and submit it to their academic committee as part of their final degree review. The recently launched "virtual" institution, Western Governors University, has included a portfolio requirement in its associate of arts

design. Although no students have progressed far enough yet to complete the requirement, the portfolio guidelines require inclusion of exhibits created during the course of the degree that demonstrate critical reasoning and analysis, research-based writing, and reflection that touches on several liberal arts disciplines. The portfolio culminates in an integrative essay reflecting on their degree study and the inter-relationship among its parts.

3. **Culminating or Capstone Experiences.** Some degree programs include final tasks that are intended to bring integration and closure. These may be courses or seminars or written studies undertaken in the last phase of the program, or they may be projects begun much earlier that are completed near the end of the degree. Usually these activities form part of a final assessment prior to degree completion.

For example, New College at St. Edward's University and Capital University's adult degree program each has a course or significant project requirement for this purpose. The Duke University master of arts in liberal studies begins a process of final project development half to two-thirds of the way to degree completion. By their next-to-last semesters, students submit formal project proposals, and in their last semesters they enroll in final project courses which lead to exit interviews, similar to master's degree oral examinations. And University College at the University of Memphis includes a final interdisciplinary special project carried out by independent study in the last one or two semesters.

The Faculty Role

The history of adult education programs has taught us that in order to achieve curricular coherence for an older, highly mobile student population, schools must depend foremost on an enhanced role for faculty. First, there must be clear communication between the student and the faculty, whether advisor, mentor, or other, on the conception of the degree as a whole and a commitment to plan toward that conception. Second, the faculty member must not only provide content specialization but perform a number of additional roles in support of students, acting as creator, ambassador, standard-setter, energizer, assessor, process specialist, coach, and collaborator (Belasen, 1995). Finally, faculty must reinforce learners' understanding of their development throughout degree study, often leading to a summative or integrating experience. It is not surprising, therefore, that adult programs often include these responsibilities in faculty position descriptions and offer their faculty continuing development programs to encourage holistic approaches to learning.

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AAC&U Resources

AAC&U Initiatives on Curricular Coherence

AAC&U initiatives involve colleges and universities of all types and sizes including both 2-year and 4-year institutions. AAC&U creates collaborative networks of campus teams working together on issues such as general education, diversity, internationalization, and new forms of collaborative leadership for academic change. Listed below are a sample of some of AAC&U initiatives of these types.

American Commitments: Boundaries and Borderlands III

This initiative supports AAC&U's work, begun in 1993, to incorporate the study of U.S. diversity and democracy into general education requirements and courses. At a summer institute for competitively selected campus teams, faculty study new scholarship on themes in U.S. pluralism, promising curricular models for teaching about diversity and democracy, effective pedagogies, and strategies for moving forward on curriculum change. Over 90 campuses took part in earlier phases of the curriculum and development effort within American Commitments, including over a dozen community colleges.

Greater Expectations

Greater Expectations is AAC&U's new multi-year project to articulate the aims of a twenty-first century college education that is responsive to the external environment and appropriate for the diverse student body now attending college. As part of Greater Expectations, we will also identify comprehensive, innovative models from community colleges and universities that improve undergraduate student learning. Throughout the Initiative we will begin to link higher educational renewal with the best aspects of secondary school reform so as to enhance student performance.

Greater Expectations for General Education and Student Transfer

This project, part of AAC&U's Greater Expectations initiative, is working with state systems, and with two- and four-year institutions to clarify the educational purposes and outcomes of

general education courses approved for transfer, to help faculty take responsibility for these outcomes, and to develop both student educational planning protocols and assessments of student learning. The initiative is testing strategies in Georgia, Maryland, and Utah, and will soon involve other states with similar objectives.

Project on Health and Higher Education (PHHE)

Historically, community colleges have been actively involved in PHHE initiatives to find pioneering ways to help students develop knowledge and responsibility for major health crises affecting their generation. Planned activities for the next five years include: increasing attention to regional collaborations (an expansion of our partners program), organizing an annual leadership seminar focusing on achieving the nation's health objectives for college students, launching and expanding a web-based, searchable database of curricular models and materials), and publishing an E-newsletter.

Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities (SENCER)

Launched in January 2001, SENCER is creating a series of national dissemination activities featuring effective curricular models that connect scientific knowledge to current topics of public importance. The goal is to improve science education by leading non-science majors into "real" science through inquiry into issues such as HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability, and nuclear proliferation. The project also plans to offer a range of special interest groups, an on-line community, and an annual summer institute for faculty and administrative teams.

Women and Scientific Literacy

Faculty at ten competitively chosen colleges, community colleges, and universities have worked for three years to incorporate Gender and Science scholarship into both general education and advanced courses, and to assess the outcomes. The aim is to make science more attractive to women by expanding the content and teaching methods of the science curriculum in traditional science departments and to add new content to women's studies programs and other humanities and social sciences departments.

For more information, visit AAC&U's website (www.aacu-edu.org) or contact us by phone at 202/387-3760.

AAC&U Statement on Liberal Learning

A truly liberal education is one that prepares us to live responsible, productive, and creative lives in a dramatically changing world. It is an education that fosters a well-grounded intellectual resilience, a disposition toward lifelong learning, and an acceptance of responsibility for the ethical consequences of our ideas and actions. Liberal education requires that we understand the foundations of knowledge and inquiry about nature, culture and society; that we master core skills of perception, analysis, and expression; that we cultivate a respect for truth; that we recognize the importance of historical and cultural context; and that we explore connections among formal learning, citizenship, and service to our communities.

We experience the benefits of liberal learning by pursuing intellectual work that is honest, challenging, and significant, and by preparing ourselves to use knowledge and power in responsible ways. Liberal learning is not confined to particular fields of study. What matters in liberal education is substantial content, rigorous methodology and an active engagement with the societal, ethical, and practical implications of our learning. The spirit and value of liberal learning are equally relevant to all forms of higher education and to all students.

Because liberal learning aims to free us from the constraints of ignorance, sectarianism, and myopia, it prizes curiosity and seeks to expand the boundaries of human knowledge. By its nature, therefore, liberal learning is global and pluralistic. It embraces the diversity of ideas and experiences that characterize the social, natural, and intellectual world. To acknowledge such diversity in all its forms is both an intellectual commitment and a social responsibility, for nothing less will equip us to understand our world and to pursue fruitful lives.

The ability to think, to learn, and to express oneself both rigorously and creatively, the capacity to understand ideas and issues in context, the commitment to live in society, and the yearning for truth are fundamental features of our humanity. In centering education upon these qualities, liberal learning is society's best investment in our shared future.

About AAC&U

AAC&U is the leading national association devoted to advancing and strengthening liberal learning for all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Since its founding in 1915, AAC&U's membership has grown to more than 700 accredited public and private colleges and universities of every type and size.

AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Its mission is to reinforce the collective commitment to liberal education at both the national and local level and to help individual institutions keep the quality of student learning at the core of their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges.

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